

Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Japan's Policy on History Problems

The aim of this project is to examine decision-making processes that led to formulation of Japanese government's official stance on history problems related to the memory of the atrocities committed during the Second World War. Two main research objectives are the following:

- Examine to what extent Japan's reaction to history problems complied with external pressures, and to what extent it was modified by domestic-level variables.
- Analyze how Japan's stance on history issues evolved after the initial response, and which factors were accountable for its maintenance or change.

This study proposes an innovative interpretation of foreign policy-making patterns based on analysis of international and domestic determinants. It is argued that in case of history awareness, the definition of national interests is particularly prone to distortions stemming from domestic-level determinants, such as ideological leanings, political power and biased perceptions of international environment by individual or institutional decision-makers. While the general direction of Japan's policy regarding history issues was determined by the international environment (such factors as security considerations or pressure from international institutions), domestic factors significantly modified foreign policy endeavors.

The project examines four history problems between Japan and its neighboring countries: biased history textbooks, prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, exploitation of 'comfort women' by the Imperial Japanese Army, as well as war apologies. Through more detailed case studies, the Principal Investigator will demonstrate that Japan's response to each of the analyzed problems resulted from a fragile compromise between various groups in the government at a given time. While suboptimal for all of the involved parties, the compromise turned out to be exceptionally durable, as it partially reconciled contrasting interpretations of national interests by separate ideological camps, and at the same time ensured a sufficient mitigation of tensions on the international level. The Principal Investigator argues that the compromise stances were formulated under strong international pressures, considerable influence of moderate politicians on decision-making process and strong position of the prime minister and/or chief cabinet secretary. The project will examine through what mechanisms these initial responses to history problems came to constrain subsequent endeavors of Japan's prime ministers.

The project will contribute to better understanding of path-dependent processes that stabilized Japan's official policy on history problems. Research results will be published in an English-language monograph by one of internationally established publishing houses.